

The Lightning Before

I.

The sea was black with night. Waves and wind were cannons against the dinghy.

A lone rowing person sat aboard, with no outward sign of disturbance. Indeed, the rower's formal tuxedo, bought from an upper thrift store, was wet with ocean. It seemed almost a shelter to the individual, as if no one so handsomely dressed could ever in fact perish.

The dinghy took unwanted water more quickly. The tuxedoed person certainly noticed, but gave it no thought under the phase of the moon. The rower was confident and expert, entirely focused on a goal— which was somewhere east of the current situation.

The rower struggled with muscle burn and the ache of cold skin. Leather belt and shoes had tightened from drenching, not unlike shackles gripping hard and firm. Cloudless wind made life a bit invaded.

East, then, to dear salvation. Or perhaps east to nothing. Whatever the case, the rower's fight went on against the gale, a carpet of stars as witness.

The person's bowtie suddenly popped by itself. This singular trick of chaos was startling, no doubt. The rower chuckled out of turn: in the middle of all this and shocked by failed clothing.

In the crazed hillscapes of water came a crest of wave so large that it seemed a great leviathan tentacle had perhaps slipped from home to watch the Fates do their play of the dinghy.

The swell caught the rower's attention. Oars were quit.

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Now, a new vision: eastern breakers and the white sand of beachfront caught beams from lunar light. The rower tipped an invisible hat to the powers that be and made quick the job of getting to a newfound shore.

With practiced skill, another great pounding rhythm of surf was captured by the oars; the dinghy rode a downward controlled fall into shallows.

However the rower miscalculated that coming drop, and the dinghy was instantly buried in waves— the rower, of course, with it.

Under the sea, the alien gloom of black was doubled by a tumbling. The individual grasped for something, anything, just a touching to make the night rooted. Nothing came, and air in the lungs grew rotten.

In a serpentine twist of ocean the rower was thrust from sea to air. Moon and stars shifted to visible and gulps for breath were next, along with a focus on the distance from land.

Not far, at all. But yet another mean wave buried the rower's head. Down down again, this time brutally scraping face on a sandy bottom. Pain hit hard as a cheek ripped open from hitting a large buried shell. Perhaps an *olivia*. Interesting.

Anger found home in large bubbles. The rower clawed at the bottom, using sand to move forward. When lungs cried loudest the individual broke to the surface, hacking and bellowing and taking oxygen to breath. And how the person laughed when they were able to stand there, not a minute from shore in slim coastal depth of maybe the length of arm.

Wading forward, the rower shambled, a dancer with buried feet.

In seconds it was ritual to sit in tiny water while searching mad seas left behind. Like prowling lions, the breakers taunted. But they were powerless now.

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An oar bobbed in the foam nearby, and the dinghy was gone. No matter, the rower thought, staring relieved at the strange beauty of it all. And struck by the brilliance of myriad stars with the cold of wind. Hm. And the seashell wound was much less than imagined. Minor tearing.

Very well.

The rower sat and sat in the water, clothes like packs of iron on limbs. Peace, the person thought. Timeless. Isolation.

It wasn't clear which day it was, nor the season. Nor even, positively, where this place even *was* on the nautical map that was seen before the previous vessel had forced escape.

Such a large ship that died and sank, leaving all to flee and try to survive— and the lone single boat, going away. With the rower. And no explanation of the fortunes none else received.

So it seems.

Bones throbbing cold the person stands, splishing toward dryness of shore. But stopping one last time to admire the natural elements that nearly claimed the whole journey.

It was then that a shark came around, or what was presumed as some sort of predator. Yes, a tall slender dorsal cut faraway waves, right near the spot where the dinghy had sunk. Obscured off and on by moving sea, the fin put the rower in a definite sadness that couldn't possibly go explained.

Anyway, a walk now to the sand like a trip to marble tile in a meadow. Arrival. How good the gritty earth felt, solid and steady.

The tuxedoed rower got set to finding a shield from winds and sky. Hardly an hour passed before the person stripped naked, built a fire, tended the duty of drying the tux.

Nude and cold and hungry (with rather fine anatomy, as it's said) the person sat before their smoky sparks, pondering a next move.

And the seashell gash had disappeared to near nothing.

Hours passed, and the person kept the fire full. A yawn and a final giving in, to slumber.

The rower curled tight next to the fire, sand and light cradling flesh.

A drop to the land of dream.

II.

A dream about angry plastic flames, blown by a fan. Transparent villains, lit from a tungsten source under and below a wooden frame. A technical phantasmic, carved from memories of the person's childhood visits to a haunted mansion.

There was a dream about the shark, or whatever the creature had been. Still in the sea offshore, it waited for either return or aerial observations, by the person.

Because the person, deeply good and benevolent and all that, had been dreadfully called "*Harpy*" by many of the age...and even "*Sorceress*" in spots here and there. But facts remained that rower is "*Hedge*" and had always been. Delightful, kind, a bit of fun mischief.

Another dream now, about rainbows in a world very much black & white.

III.

Still dark when the first noise was heard, somewhere above the sea. A roar. No, a scream of something, wild but not alive. Closer it came; sound sputtered and flexed, spread in stereos and monos and possibly dimension, real or not.

The fire was now but embers and haze, and the person stared out over sea, curious of so many weird sounds approaching. There. Yes, that. Indeed, the moon-glow painted a definite outline of a great thing coming forward, from over the sky.

Uh oh. The kaleidoscope night would not finish as thought.

And what of the day?

End.